

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,—

We could not have believed until we saw it that our people could show under strain so much courage, steadfastness, devotion to duty and kindness to one another, with innumerable individual acts of heroism shining out like stars. Let us thank God and take courage.

But severer tests have yet to come. What can we do to keep alive in ourselves and in others an undaunted, constant, and hopeful spirit? There is a vital contribution which each of us can make. Our little lives, with their hopes and fears, are tiny islands in the encompassing ocean of a vast, unseen, spiritual world—more real than the things of which we read in the newspapers and hear in broadcasts. It is in this unseen sphere that the great battle is being waged between the forces of light and darkness. Each of us has his daily part to play in that spiritual warfare. Each of us can take a few moments, if exacting duties allow us no more, to fix our mind steadily on the reality of God, Who is Light, Life and Love. Those of us whose day permits it can bring strength to toilers, fighters and sufferers by taking longer time to allow the love of God to soak into and possess our whole being. All of us may maintain our contact with the world of Light as we go about our tasks by a momentary act of recollection such as breathing the words 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,' or such other symbolic act as we individually find most helpful. From those whose hearts are thus possessed by the peace of God there will radiate, without their knowing it, a calm and confidence which will help to banish fear, revive drooping spirits and rekindle hope.

I have written of this before. Shall we pay the price of committing ourselves to this ministry, in the knowledge that we are bound together in its exercise with many members of the News-Letter and others beyond its membership?

## THE BOMBING OF CIVILIANS

Anger and resentment at the inhuman bombing of our civilian population have led to the demand that we should retaliate in kind. It has been proposed, for example, that we should select several towns in Germany and announce that after a given time in which the women and children can be evacuated we shall wipe out each town in turn on successive nights.

It is maintained that the disorganisation of civilian life is an important military weapon in the use of which Germany cannot be allowed a monopoly; that a policy of reprisals is the only means of protecting our own civilian population from inhuman cruelty; and that whatever leads to the quicker defeat of Germany will shorten the war and thereby lessen most effectively and speedily the total sum of human suffering. These are the arguments not only of those blinded by rage and fear but of humane and high-minded men. They are none the less fallacious and dangerous.

The evacuation of women and children at short notice is not really practicable, as a little reflection will show; the suggestion only cloaks the real issue. The Secretary of State



for Air has told us that to divert aeroplanes and bombs from military objectives would be a betrayal of the suffering people of London. Moreover, we cannot compete with the Germans in frightfulness. They will always go one better. If we attempt to emulate them in this field, the war will move more and more to a condition of utterly senseless destruction without any meaning or purpose beyond itself. It will be the end of civilisation and of all we value. If we are fighting for civilisation, let us preserve what we can of its values.

The real objections, however, lie deeper than these utilitarian considerations. We are waging this war for the good of mankind; it is that faith that sustains us through the trial. Our actions must be determined in the light of that purpose. If our aim is to create a better international order, the co-operation of the peoples of Europe is essential to success. How can we hope for such co-operation, if by acts which offend the moral sense of the common man we plant in the minds of Germans the bitterest memories and make it more difficult for other peoples to recognise any moral difference between the Nazis and ourselves?

The whole Christian tradition is opposed to the view that everything is permissible in war in order to win. The deliberate, as distinct from the accidental, killing of the innocent has always been regarded as something that cannot be excused. Children, at least, have no responsibility for the war or the way it is waged. This is true also of many of the common people. To slaughter these of set purpose is to violate the moral law. If we believe in God and seek His aid we may not do what is evil in His sight.

I am well aware that this position is not capable of logical defence—certainly not in a brief paragraph. War is the supreme irrationality. The pacifist will say that the argument condemns war altogether. The German will say 'If you starve women and children by blockade, why stick at bombing them?' I agree that the line is hard to draw; I am sure that there is a line to be drawn somewhere. Christianity has no meaning unless for every man there is a point where he says 'Here I stand before an absolute; this is unconditionally forbidden.'

The point is the one I tried to make in the Supplement to C.N.-L. No. 45, where I suggested that the only way out of our present troubles is a return to the essential truth about man's nature, that he is a dependent being. He is *not* free to do whatever he thinks will further his own purposes. He depends on God and must obey His laws.

If the difficulty of knowing the line on which to stand is puzzling and inhibits action, the argument about the nature of our purpose offers sufficient practical guidance. If you agree with the conclusion (on whatever grounds), take a hand, so far as you can, in creating a public opinion which will oppose the pressure to retaliate in kind.

## CREATING COMMUNITY

The following extracts from a letter from an air-raid warden suggest some of the things that may be done in war time to forge new social bonds:

"After reading your Supplement 'The Way Out,' it has occurred to me that perhaps some account of the work of an air-raid warden in a London suburb may be of interest to you. Although a subscriber to the Christian News-Letter, I cannot claim to be a Christian. I know, however, that as you say, 'the fundamental evil is that man has become divorced from the true sources of his being,' and that 'the root cause of all our troubles is the boundless egoism of the isolated self.' It was in full awareness of this that I set out, as an air-raid warden, to inspect the gas-masks of people in the streets assigned to me, to advise them about their shelters, and to perform other small duties which naturally fell to the lot of a warden.

"My duties as a warden gave me access to people's houses, upon an errand which was of immediate concern to them. My wife was also greatly interested in this enterprise. We found many lonely people, and some who were frightened because they were lonely.



Having made friends with them we invited some of the women to tea, and we soon formed a group in affiliation with the Women's Voluntary Services. This group, which has grown rapidly, holds weekly meetings for tea, gossip, knitting and the promotion in many ways of good neighbourliness and war preparedness. There is also a Savings Group. We have had practices in fire-fighting and in bandaging. There have been exchanges of vegetable seedlings and a mutual stimulation of 'digging for victory'; and the group has proved itself a nuisance to the Borough Council by persistent criticism of its inadequate salvage arrangements. The result of all this combined activity has been a strong bond of friendship among the women, and in the case of those who are married this has come to include their families.

"Our next move was to form a country dance group. We began with the air-raid warden of the post to which I am attached. After a few practices in the house we danced on the front lawn. Among the spectators who gathered at the garden gate were men and women from an L.C.C. ambulance station across the way. These and others were soon persuaded to dance. As the group continued to grow we hired the large hall of a central school which is partly occupied by an auxiliary fire station. We soon had the firemen dancing, and about a dozen of them are now among our most enthusiastic members. Women from the knitting group also come, some to dance, some to watch their children dancing, and some to help with the refreshments and in the promotion of general friendliness. It is not easy to describe the simple joyousness of these weekly meetings. Moving to the rhythm of the traditional dance tunes, our people recover contact with one of the deepest sources of instinctive happiness."

## A DYNAMIC CHRISTIANITY

I also have a letter from a Fellow of a Cambridge college. It is too long to quote in full, but I shall try to give the gist of it. The writer says:—

"In your letter of July 31st you say 'I believe that out of the welter of the present something dynamic is struggling to be born.' To very many of us these words are particularly welcome. For it is just that 'something dynamic' which present-day Christianity has seemed to lack. The Archbishop of York has through your columns made an impressive appeal for economic reformation; others have called us repeatedly to social improvements, moral rearmament, numberless political and civil ideals; others again pin their faith to a return to the old habits of Church-going and religious observance. All these things, at least in their general scope, are wholly admirable; but somehow they fail to produce that 'something dynamic' which alone can ensure their fulfilment. It is this that we need above all things; and we are very far from having achieved it at all universally.

"That Christianity can, and actually did, produce this dynamic energy, no one can deny. The first Christians had no power to alter the social, political, economic structure of their time. They were concerned wholly with a living relationship, the impact of personality, the personality of God, as brought within man's comprehension by His incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ, on our personalities.

"Personal devotion to a personal Christ is the ultimate purpose of every Christian body. But only too often we have allowed this relationship to be used as the means to a further end. We treat it as the needful preliminary to further Christian activity. We cannot develop our love for Christ on such terms. We must learn to love Christ for himself and in the light of that love we shall discover more and more how to act in accordance with his will.

The chief means of doing this, the writer says, is prayer. Prayer embraces the whole field of our relationship with God and in Him with our fellow men. This relationship is described in the New Testament by the word "love," and the analogy of human friendship at its highest level is used to explain it. This helps to make clear the essential characteristics of prayer.



The first characteristic is its essential openness and frankness. In our prayers we must dare to treat God as a friend.

The second characteristic is its intense creative activity. "True love drives us out to use our whole power of body, mind, and soul to help our friend. But it does more than this; intuitively it inspires us to discover ever fresh ways to give that help, and to give it effectively. Our love for Christ cannot mean less than this. The thing that he asks us to do for him is to help others to find in him their best. The whole world is his fellowship of friends. For his sake that fellowship, and every member of it, demands our utmost help. Our every action, whether concerned with someone we know or not, must be determined by its value in helping to bring the best out of the person or persons affected by it.

"From this follows the third characteristic of prayer. However much our love for Christ may stir us to the help of his fellowship, we cannot give the best that is in us unless we are prepared for his sake to train ourselves in rigid discipline. Steadily, regularly, unflaggingly, we need to exercise ourselves in the practice of intercourse with God and in work for the fellowship for His sake.

"This is a call to action, something we can set out to do here and now. In our prayers, in our work, in our social intercourse, in our every moment and occasion of life, we have got to set to work to make Christ our friend and get him to lead us. We have got to let his personality fill our minds as the personality of those we love on earth does. This was the strength of the early Church; it must be our strength to-day."

#### THE NEWS-LETTER OFFICE

I arrived last Tuesday at the Underground station nearest to our office to find myself debarred from proceeding further. I went on to a luncheon engagement at which my colleague, Miss Iredale, was also due, and when she arrived I found that she had forced her way through barriers which I had found impenetrable and evacuated the office, transporting the machines, records and indexes, the 10,500 addressed envelopes for the News-Letter, and our staff to the headquarters of the Student Christian Movement at Golders Green. When I arrived there after the luncheon the staff was installed in the refectory and other corners all busily engaged in filling the News-Letter envelopes. Original subscribers will remember that the News-Letter was brought into existence under the hospitable roof of the Student Christian Movement, and in this emergency they have once again with ungrudging generosity given us a temporary resting place. The only damage to the office at Balcombe Street is some broken glass and woodwork, but the presence of time bombs in the neighbourhood made evacuation necessary.

All correspondence should still be sent to Balcombe Street.

Yours sincerely,

*D. H. De Laan*

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*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

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